

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00

PA-01 ICA-11 SP-02 /037 W

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 443

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJ: SIGNS OF MOVEMENT IN THE SINGAPORE POLITICAL SCENE: BY-
ELECTIONS AND CABINET CHANGES

REF: (A) 77 SINGAPORE A-60, (B) 77 SINGAPORE A-133

1. SUMMARY: DEATH OF MP ON JUNE 4 MAKES PARLIAMENTARY
BY-ELECTION NECESSARY. THERE ARE REPORTS THAT 2-3
ADDITIONAL BY-ELECTIONS MAY BE HELD TO BRING NEW BLOOD
INTO GOVERNMENT. ENDING OF 18-MONTH POST-ELECTION
PERIOD AFTER WHICH PRIME MINISTER HAS PROMISED MAJOR
NEW APPOINTMENTS, TOGETHER WITH CURRENT SHUFFLING OF
SECOND AND THIRD ECHELON OFFICIALS, HAS CREATED
SPECULATION ON POSSIBLE CABINET CHANGES. MAJOR REVIEW
OF LONG-RANGE GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PLANS BY SENIOR
OFFICIALS IS UNDERWAY. PARLIAMENT MAY BE PROROGUED
FOLLOWING JUNE 14 SITTING TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY TO
ANNOUNCE NEW POLICIES ON CONVENING OF NEW SESSION.
END SUMMARY.

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2. DEATH OF P. GOVINDASWAMY (ANSON) ON JUNE 4 MAKES
A BY-ELECTION NECESSARY FOR HIS PARLIAMENTARY SEAT.
PRESS HAS SPECULATED THAT THERE MAY BE AS MANY AS
THREE ADDITIONAL BY-ELECTIONS IN COMING MONTHS TO
INJECT, AS STRAITS TIMES PUTS IT, "FRESH BLOOD AND
PERHAPS NEW THINKING INTO THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP."
THREE SITTING MPS ARE SAID TO BE PLANNING

RETIREMENT OR ARE LIKELY TO BE DROPPED BY PAP.
COMMENT: EMBASSY EXPECTS THAT MOST LIKELY RETIREE
WILL BE DR. ANG KOK PENG, WHO HAS INDICATED DESIRE
TO RETURN TO FULL-TIME ACADEMIC CAREER. OTHER
POSSIBILITIES, ALL BACK-BENCHERS, INCLUDE ANG NAM
PIAU (THOMSON), YONG NYUK LIN (GEYLANG WEST), NG
YEOW CHONG (MOUNTBATTEN), HAJI RAHMAT BIN KENAP
(GEYLANG SERAI; A LONG-TIME PAP WORKHORSE, BUT
REPORTED TO BE IN ILL HEALTH), AND DR. LEE CHIAW
MENG (FARRER PARK--NEARLY DROPPED IN 1976 ELECTIONS,
BUT NOT REALLY LIKELY TO STEP ASIDE NOW).

3. STRAITS TIMES SUGGESTS THAT NEW PAP BY-ELECTION
CANDIDATES WILL INCLUDE A TRADE UNION LEADER, A
SPORTS COUNCIL OFFICIAL, A COMPUTER CENTER
DIRECTOR AND A SENIOR CIVIL SERVANT. ACCORDING
EMBASSY SOURCES, LIST COULD INCLUDE FOLLOWING:
V. JAYAKODY, NTUC SECRETARY FOR ORGANIZATION AND
GRADUATE OF HARVARD TRADE UNION PROGRAM (THUS
COMBINING BOTH UNION EXPERIENCE AND THE HIGHER
EDUCATION WHICH HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT
CONSIDERATIONS FOR PAP CANDIDACY); SINGAPORE SPORTS
COUNCIL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LAU TENG CHUAN, FORMER
TEACHER AND CIVIL SERVANT WITH REPUTATION FOR
ABILITY; LEONG KUO SING, DIRECTOR OF NANYANG
UNIVERSITY COMPUTER CENTER AND FORMER REGISTRAR OF
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NANYANG, A CAPABLE PERSON (AND WITH NANYANG SOMEWHAT
UNDER SEIGE, IT COULD BE A GOOD POLITICAL MOVE TO
TOSS SOME RECOGNITION IN THAT DIRECTION). LIST
OF SUITABLE SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS FOR BY-ELECTION
CANDIDATES IS MORE OPEN. ONE POSSIBILITY WOULD BE
HERMAN HOCHSTADT, PERMANENT SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
MINISTRY, AND LIM KIM WOON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF
EDUCATION (SAID TO BE CLOSE TO PRIME MINISTER AND
HIS FAMILY) BOTH OF WHOM SEEN DESTINED FOR HIGHER
POSITIONS.

4. OF MORE IMMEDIATE SIGNIFICANCE ARE
INDICATIONS THAT CABINET CHANGES MAY BE IN OFFING,
AS WELL AS FURTHER CHANGES IN SECOND AND THIRD
ECHELON MINISTRY OFFICIALS. (FULLER INFORMATION ON
LOWER ECHELON CHANGES ALREADY MADE, INCLUDING BIO
DATA, BEING SENT BY AIRGRAM.) RUMORED CABINET
CHANGES INVOLVE POSSIBLE RETIREMENT OF FINANCE
MINISTER HON SUI SEN, WHO HAS BEEN IN ILL HEALTH AND
RELATIVELY INACTIVE. FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM,
ALTHOUGH AGE 60 AND SOMETIMES TALKS ABOUT RETIRING
TO A QUIETER LIFE, IS UNLIKELY TO LEAVE THE MINISTRY

OR TO RELINGUISH HIS POSITION AS ONE OF THE THREE
KEY DECISION MAKERS IN PAP AND GOVERNMENT. OTHER
CHANGES COULD COME THROUGH SPLITTING PORTFOLIOS:
HOME AFFAIRS AND EDUCATION, NOW HELD BY CHUA SIAN
CHIN; NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS, NOW
HELD BY LIM KIM SAN; AND LAW, ENVIRONMENT, AND
SCIENCE-TECHNOLOGY, ALL THREE HELD BY E.W. BARKER
(WHO, ALTHOUGH HE IS NO LONGER TALKING ABOUT
RETIRING, MIGHT BE HAPPY WITH A LIGHTER LOAD.
LIM KIM SAN, VISIBLY AGING AND INCREASINGLY
INACTIVE, MIGHT GIVE UP BOTH PORTFOLIOS, ALTHOUGH
THERE IS NO CLEAR SUCCESSOR IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
SO HE MIGHT RETAIN LATTER FOR SOME TIME.

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5. JUNE 7 STRAITS TIMES ARTICLE FORESEES NUMBER OF
MINISTERIAL CHANGES BUT SUGGESTS THAT ONLY TWO
SENIOR MINISTERS OF STATE (WHOM IT DOES NOT IDENTIFY)
ARE LIKELY TO BE ELEVATED TO CABINET STATUS. WE
BELIEVE MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES FOR ELEVATION ARE
ONG TENG CHONG, NOW SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR
COMMUNICATIONS AND ACTING MINISTER OF CULTURE, WHO
IS LIKELY TO BE MADE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS; AND
CHAI CHONG YII, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR
EDUCATION, LIKELY TO BECOME MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

6. OTHER POSSIBILITIES FOR CABINET POSTS INCLUDE
COH CHOK TONG, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FINANCE,
AS POSSIBLE REPLACEMENT FOR HON SUI SEN. GOH IS

HIGHLY REGARDED AND IS SCHEDULED TO GO TO WASHINGTON FOR U.S.-ASEAN MEETING LATER THIS SUMMER, BUT THERE IS SOME FEELING HE HAS NOT YET BEEN IN HIS PRESENT JOB LONG ENOUGH TO TAKE OVER AS MINISTER. AHMAD MATTAR, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE AND ACTING MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, MAY ALSO BE CONFIRMED AS MINISTER.

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7. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN RUMORS THAT LEE KHOON CHOY, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE PEOPLES' ASSOCIATION, MIGHT BE MADE MINISTER OF CULTURE. LEE IS VERY WELL THOUGHT OF, AND WITH INCREASING EMPHASIS IN GOVERNMENT POLICY ON "QUALITY OF LIFE" AND STRENGTHENING LINKS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE, HE MIGHT BE THE TRUSTED LIEUTENANT TO PUT IN CHARGE OF THIS ENDEAVOR. SIGNIFICANTLY, ONE OF LAST YEAR'S BRIGHT YOUNG MEN, TAN ENG LIANG, HAS JUST BEEN MOVED FROM SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FINANCE, APPARENTLY TO MOVE HIM OUT OF THE LINE OF SUCCESSION FOR MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

8. IN COURSE OF FAREWELL CALLS ON SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, AMBASSADOR LEARNED THAT PRIME MINISTER HAS BEEN CONDUCTING SEMINAR FOR SOME HUNDRED SECOND-ECHELON LEADERS TO DISCUSS SINGAPORE'S POLICIES FOR THE NEXT DECADE. FOCUS OF SEMINAR IS APPARENTLY ON IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE IN SINGAPORE. FROM SPEECHES OF GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND PRESS INTERVIEWS, IT APPEARS THAT EVALUATIONS ARE ALSO BEING MADE OF ECONOMIC PLANNING, LINKS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE, AND QUESTION OF POLITICAL SUCCESSION. EMBASSY IS PREPARING SEPARATE MESSAGE ON THESE REVIEWS.

9. COMMENT: ONE OF MAIN STRENGTHS OF LEE KUAN YEW'S ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN ITS ABILITY TO ANTICIPATE PROBLEMS AND ITS FLEXIBILITY IN ADJUSTING PAST POLICIES TO MEET THEM. OVER THE YEARS LEE HAS SHOWN CONSISTENT AWARENESS OF NEED TO BRING

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NEW BLOOD AND NEW IDEAS INTO GOVERNMENT. RELATIVE YOUTH AND STABILITY OF CURRENT TOP LEADERSHIP,

HOWEVER, HAS MEANT THAT SEVERAL GROUPS OF BRIGHT
YOUNG MEN HAVE COME AND GONE WITHOUT SETTling
QUESTION OF EVENTUAL POLITICAL SUCCESSION. ANOTHER
OF THE REGIME'S PERIODIC SEARCHING INQUIRIES INTO PERSONNEL
AND POLICIES IS NOW APPARENTLY UNDERWAY. ALTHOUGH
WE MAY EXPECT A CONTINUED INFUSION OF NEW TALENT
INTO GOVERNMENT, POSSIBLY ACCOMPANIED BY SOME
SHIFTS IN EMPHASIS IN GOVERNMENT POLICIES, DRASTIC
CHANGES ARE NOT LIKELY. THE PRESENT MIX, DESPITE LEE'S
INSTITUTIONAL PESSIMISM, HAS BEEN TOO SUCCESSFUL FOR THAT.
INGRAHAM

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